

**To: Vermont Library Working Group**  
**From: Meg Allison, VSLA Representative**  
**Re: Testimony on the topic of Library Programming**  
**Date: November 11, 2021**

**1. Testimony from Susie Snow, teacher-librarian at Hiawatha Elementary School, Essex Junction, VT.**

Throughout the school year, our K-3 library provides units of study connected to the AASL and Social Justice standards. I am currently working with another early elementary school librarian to improve our collection focusing on equity, diversity, and social justice.

During COVID, my school library lost about \$1,200 worth of library books. We are hoping to find funding to replace these books.

**2. Testimony from Katherine Hancock, Library Media Specialist at Newport City Elementary School, Newport City, VT.**

Recently there have been questions among fellow staff members about how to implement quality equity policies when we have a very large racial majority in our school's community. Teachers and other staff wonder how we can prepare our students for what they will encounter and see in the wider world if they do not encounter racial differences as much in northeast Vermont as they would someplace else. I firmly believe that having a strong library program and a trained library media specialist can help remedy this issue. They can recommend books and resources to teachers that provide mirrors for students' lives, but also open new doors for them as well. The library can be a place to encounter new stories and find ways to empathize with them. Libraries are integral for so many reasons, but I find that this is one of the most important and pressing reasons why we need great libraries in Vermont schools.

**3. Testimony from Julie Altemose, School Librarian at Mary Hogan Elementary School, Middlebury, VT:**

Our school library is a bustling place! So far this school year (Sept.-Oct), we have loaned out 5, 830 books! We are hosting our month long Read-a-thon during November. We challenge kids to read extra minutes and they can win some prizes for their success in meeting their target times. We are connecting with 5 authors

who will make virtual visits with our classrooms! We work with the Middlebury College students who are in the Page One Literacy club. They offer virtual story-times, family book club discussions, and free books for our students! In addition, we collaborate with the UPS Store and Bonnie's Book Foundation to make sure ALL students have books to read at home. We host Free Book Giveaways at least 2 times per year.

We collaborate with our town library to offer programs and book clubs for families. We also created a reading challenge for our 2nd-3rd graders so that all students are challenged to read new books. It's called the Midd Reads program and we encourage children to participate throughout the year. It's one more challenge students can do in addition to reading the Vermont Red Clover books and the Golden Dome Book List.

Throughout last year, students could not physically visit the library, but our circulation remained high! We delivered books on carts through the halls of the school and students ordered books online!

Last year, our PTO group donated \$1,000 for books to be purchased that focus on cultural diversity and inclusion. We were able to put new books in every classroom!

With the librarian having a flexible schedule this year, students are receiving support as they work on inquiry projects in their classroom. They are learning how to use the Gale Online database and assess other credible sources. They are also learning how to properly cite the sources they use during the research process. We plan to continue supporting children as they research different topics and learn important media literacy skills! The library is the hub of learning in our school!

#### **4. Testimony from Alyson Mahony, Librarian at Doty and Rumney Elementary Schools, Worcester and Middlesex, VT:**

School libraries have been an essential service and safe community for all during the pandemic. Librarians play a pivotal role in supporting learners in person and remotely. We see all of our students and faculty and customize information resources, technology integration, pleasure and academic reading. We work with administration on all levels, to create fresh, relevant professional development. We provide fixed, scheduled classes on media literacy, inquiry, STEAM, and the love of literature. We also pivot easily to integrate skills and resources into classroom projects. During this stressful, understaffed time, teaching librarians can bridge the gaps and holes in a professional way that supports student achievement and

belonging. There have been many studies done over the years that show that fully funded robust library programming can increase students scores and engagement in school. School and public libraries have always been the center of reliable information, public discourse and community which is essential to our democratic values. It is clear that Vermonters value both education and democracy and that is why we must advocate for a full time librarian and tech integrationist in every school, no matter the size.

**5. Testimony from Jill Abair, Teacher Librarian at U-32 Middle and High School, East Montpelier, VT:**

The library started as a way to provide access to knowledge for those that couldn't afford it. We still do that today, but that is just the beginning. We at the U-32 Middle & High School library provide services, support and safety for our community. Our space is used by our entire school community, both the Middle & High School as well as our alternative education students. We do more than just check out books. We provide access to thousands of windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors to anyone willing to take some time to sit with a book and learn more. Either about themselves or others. We provide programming which gives students a voice through collaborative learning opportunities, open mics, facilitated discussions around relevant topics and the ability to connect with authors in real time. Our programming allows our learners to express themselves through making and exploring with 3D materials, virtual reality worlds, custom design software and more. Through these last few years of the pandemic our students have missed out on spending time in spaces where they can truly be themselves. This is a judgement free zone. No reading level restrictions or refusing access to resources. We are an open space this year, and it has been a blessing welcoming back our learners, and it's obvious they've missed us too. Today we welcomed over one hundred students to our small space within just an hour-long period. They come here during recess, not just because they live in Vermont and the alternative is to go outside when it's cold, but because this is where their friends are. This is where they belong. If we had a larger space, if we had the appropriate support and man power, the possibilities for the space and our students would be sky high. Imagine what you could do if you had the support to do anything you ever wanted. To learn anything your heart desired. What a better world we would be if we could explore our own curiosities with the guidance of qualified educators? Instead of getting lost in the rabbit hole of Google with misinformation, we could be guided down paths with clear boundaries and never ending greenlights. When our students feel supported they rise to the challenge. We've seen greatness here and are excited to see what happens next.

**6. Testimony from Meg B.Allison, Teacher-Librarian at U-32 Middle and High School, East Montpelier, VT:**

Every school in Vermont needs a full time library media specialist who is capable of providing instruction, collaborating with content teachers, integrating digital media into the curriculum, and curating inclusive collections for Vermont's public school children.

The praxis of educational programming and school libraries provides extraordinary opportunities, unbound by one's imagination or community needs. It is only bound by understaffed, underfunded, and uninspired school libraries. The potential is truly limitless.

A school library is the only academic site within a school where all identities intersect. Therefore, it is a powerful site to explore justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. School libraries are containers for courageous conversations, where all stakeholders are welcome to lean into dialogues that might not be possible elsewhere. For example, at U-32 Middle and High School, community dialogues, partially funded with a mini-grant from the VT-NEA, were integral to the campaign to eliminate hate symbols, like the Confederate flag. Stakeholders, such as parents and voters, were eager to participate in supported discussion protocols with one another, but especially, school staff and students.

Additionally programming opportunities are available with other community partners, such as the Vermont Humanities Council and their VT Reads programs. U-32 co-partnered with our Friends of Washington Central Education group to facilitate evening book discussions, via Zoom, to discuss *The Hate U Give*, by Angie Thomas. Topics such as systemic racism, police brutality, and microaggressions were discussed, leading this librarian to conclude that our communities are hungry for these rich and valuable discussions with our young people. Additionally, funding for these programs to take place outside of school hours, to support the expertise of school librarians in the room, is something for serious consideration.

School librarians have core values tied to our national standards - at the heart of which is inclusion. Inclusion is more than just having inclusive collections. It is about embedding inclusion into every component of our learning spheres - having inclusive policies, curriculum, and spaces.

**7. Testimony from Eileen Vaughn, Library Media Specialist/STEM Teacher at Barnard Academy, Killington Elementary, Reading Elementary & Woodstock Elementary, Windsor Central Supervisory Union, VT:**

I teach 13 STEM classes each week in 3 schools (grades K-6, 184 students). I am also responsible for 4 elementary school libraries (as a "consultant" and teacher).

I like to use books as much as possible to introduce my STEM lessons. Right now I really don't have the time to do much book talking or literature enrichment.

I see WES students on Mondays, and only see classes every other week for about 20 minutes. (about 95 students each week) This allows me just a bit of time to introduce a story, vocabulary or a library lesson. I have been weeding the shelves and tidying up. WES has a library assistant who can check out books when I am not there.

I am the only Library Media Specialist for the WCSU elementary libraries. My endorsement is PreK-12. We have a 5th elementary, and the SU has sent the library assistant (a para) to take care of that library.

Since our schools merged, my library classes basically ended. I continue to take care of the students, staff, stacks and ordering (for all of my schools).

I am responsible for 375 students for my library piece of teaching. Again, whenever I can, I integrate books and STEM.

The effect of COVID: Last school year I was assigned as the K-3 remote reading teacher for our district. Because of that, my time with any library services was very limited. I ordered books, and some students were able to have a regular checkout if their teacher arranged that. WES has a library assistant, and he was present for checkouts. I sent home books to my virtual students.

Yes, I am focusing on selecting books that honor diversity. I feel that our Red Clover and Golden Dome books have always taken diversity into consideration. Our SU is offering PD on diversity.

**8. Testimony from Genevieve Gallagher, Librarian at South Burlington High School, South Burlington, VT:**

The SBHS School Library has programming both within the library and throughout the larger SBHS community. We bring library programming into classrooms by collaborating with teachers to deliver instruction in research methods and accessing digital resources. Students know that their needs for research and reading can be met in our library. We have an "ask a librarian" form where questions can be directed to library staff and they can receive assistance even if they can't make it into the library. The library also has a book purchase consideration form where students

and staff can request that specific books be purchased for our library. The library has monthly spotlight displays that share books by a wide variety of authors and in many student-interest subject areas. Along with the physical displays of books and materials in hallways and the library, we post our content/author spotlights on the library's Instagram (@sbhs\_library) page that has 245 followers (many of whom are students). We've highlighted books featuring lgbtqia+ characters, books by Native American and First Nations authors, books by Black authors from around the world, books related to the anniversary of September 11th and the social and military consequences of that event, and all of these collections of books are featured not only in displays and Instagram posts, but they remain active as digital collections in our catalog for students and staff to return to at any time. The SBHS Library maintains a recording "studio" with a green screen, professional lighting, and microphones. This allows students to create multimedia content to demonstrate their learning. In order to serve students and teachers who may need to step away from the cacophony of their day, we have a do not disturb room and mindfulness space that allows folks to work in complete silence. On the other end of the spectrum, we have a group workspace called the Think Tank where student groups can meet to collaborate. Our library program is dedicated to providing instruction and materials to meet the ever changing needs of our community.

**9. Testimony from Cara Clopton, School Librarian at the Allen Brook School, Williston, VT:**

Choice and voice are at the heart of our Allen Brook School library program. We serve 325 students in PreK-grade 2, their families, our staff, faculty, administration, and student interns. We have no limits, no fees, and no fines to promote equity and build on young children's boundless curiosities. Story times center on social and emotional skill building, diverse author and illustrator study, and researching our natural world together. During remote lesson times when children and families quarantined, recorded read-alouds and opportunities to connect in real time for book talks were commonplace.

**10. Testimony from Peter Langella, Librarian at Champlain Valley Union High School, Hinesburg, VT:**

Two issues rise to the top when thinking about school libraries: 1) Equity of staffing and equity of budget, and 2) Social Justice.

1) From 2007-2008 to 2018-2019, librarian FTE statewide went from 220 to 197, or a 10% decrease. Unfortunate, but, other than a few schools that aren't in compliance

with the EQS language that says all schools with at least 300 students must have a full-time school librarian, it's mostly due to an overall decrease in student enrollment.

However, in the same period of 2007-2008 to 2018-2019, library support staff FTE statewide went from 136 to 71, a decrease of 47%. The implications for our profession are huge. And these numbers are before the pandemic. More support staff have likely been lost over the past two years.

That "and sufficient support staff" from EQS is being ignored in a big way. 47% of school libraries have lost support staff in a decade.

The data are on Table 1, rows 264-287 here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16OVFkt6tRit8UZaF7JKQMhPVo9EHepzg/edit#gid=701982777>

Similar discrepancies exist when it comes to budgets. Many have been cut deeply, and inequities abound.

2) School libraries are on the front lines of social justice in Vermont. Our libraries must work to create spaces where all students, and especially those from historically marginalized and oppressed backgrounds, feel welcomed, represented, honored, and affirmed in who they are and who they want to be. As an example, please take a look at the Vermont School Library Association's Statement on Intellectual Freedom: [tinyurl.com/VSLAIF](http://tinyurl.com/VSLAIF)

#### **11. Testimony from Jennifer Hill, Librarian at Crossett Brook Middle School, Duxbury, VT:**

The Trish Feld Library of Crossett Brook Middle School serves 300 5th - 8th graders. The library offers access to a book collection of 14,186 middle grade fiction and nonfiction books. Since the start of this school year, we have already circulated 3,315 books! This is a big change from last year with our library being closed to browsing for COVID reasons. Last year between the start of school and November 10, 2020 we were able to circulate 1,166 books which was good considering we were not 100% in attendance for Mon-Fri. The other part of our circulation that was different due to COVID was the limitation to only browse books on our online catalog.

In addition to the book collection, the library focuses on supporting all students in quality research, source analysis and critical thinking. This is accomplished through

collaboration with all different teachers and classes from math and social studies to social emotional learning and sustainability. The library as a dynamic learning space offers lots of opportunities for students to explore and express themselves through green screen, book creation, storytelling and more.

The Trish Feld Library and the librarian play a key role in supporting the cultural diversity and inclusion of all different learners in our community. Learning about identity is a large part of our program as students read books about all different kinds of people and experiences. As co-advisor to the Crossett Brook Pride Alliance, the librarian is actively supporting the students of the LGBTQ+ and Ally community. The many authentic experiences in resiliency that span from the Advisory Group to the whole class instruction and individual connections happens every day as the library and librarian meets each learner where they are at.

## **12. Testimony from Sarah Keener, Librarian/Tech Integrationist at Hazen Union School, Hardwick, VT:**

In the role of librarian in a middle and high school, I have a unique perspective because I work with students of all age levels, in all content areas and in diverse settings and programs. Likewise, I collaborate with faculty and staff from all corners of the school. My involvement with the local library and a broad network of community partners, and with the vibrant VSLA community, keeps me informed about opportunities outside the school's walls as well. As a result, I am able to identify needs and potential resources in order to facilitate connections to a wide variety of people, programs, services and resources.

Libraries offer accessible and inclusive physical and virtual spaces where all are welcome to "think, create, share and grow." Inspecting the AASL Learner Framework and Key Commitments, you see that librarians are responsible for - well, everything! While the scope and depth can be overwhelming, this means we have an exciting amount of freedom and flexibility in programming. In my own practice, I think about "assets" in the broadest sense possible, and my reference and organizational responsibilities and tasks go far beyond the stacks. Beyond AASL, I look for guidance in the mandates and missions of my school and district; Act 173, MTSS and LREs; and Vermont Act 77, Flexible Pathways, "Portrait of a Graduate" and transferable skills. In letter and in spirit, all of these standards and principles help me feel confident pursuing programming in inquiry, literacy, social justice and advocacy, multimedia storytelling, STEAM, community service, entrepreneurship, SEL activities and more. All of this is helping our library grow into a school hub for engaging and authentic project-based, community-centered educational

opportunities. At the same time, it is a sanctuary for many, providing a safe, quiet space for reading, reflection and relaxation. We are already seeing evidence of the ways in which a "future-ready library" that casts a broad net in programming initiatives can reach diverse, often disengaged and marginalized/underserved, youth in our school system.

Libraries serve everyone in the school community: students, families, faculty and staff. Librarians see the big picture, but we also have our feet on the ground. Even through the isolating and challenging times of COVID, our schools have counted on libraries and librarians to disseminate information, share valuable resources and bring people together. School library programming (and the outside programming we connect our patrons to) plays a vital role in building and maintaining cohesive, healthy and equitable communities.

Specific examples to show the breadth of school library programming from our library:

- Audio storytelling, podcasts, ethnography and community interviews with Vermont Folklife Center and VPR (including teacher workshops)
- Health and wellness partnerships with Healthy Lamoille Valley - pilot for school version of "Live Your Why Passport Edition"
- Support of student wellness and advocacy committee
- Teach class (and additional collaborations) around community and food with the Center for Agricultural Community
- Facilitate field trips to the local historical society (Hardwick Historical Society)
- Vermont Reads with local library (Jeudevine) and supporting community partners
- Vermont book awards programming: Green Mountain and Golden Dome
- Partnership with local Makerspace (Spark)
- Support of student internships
- Career Cafe - guest speakers from various professions
- Vermont FIRST Robotics club
- E-sports club
- Student volunteer and student aid positions in library and makerspace